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ABSTRACT

A practicum was conducted to address the needs of teachers and administrators in Pasco County, Florida to provide programs for kindergarten children who were developmentally younger than their chronological 5 years of age. The program goal was to increase the maturity of at least one developmental behavior in each child by at least 80 percent; judgments were made on the basis of questionnaire responses of teachers, teacher aides, and parents. Curriculum-oriented directed play was chosen as the solution to the local problem. Twenty kindergarten children, grouped homogeneously by birthday, were taught various methods of interaction in sociodramatic play. Instruction followed locally mandated curriculum guidelines. Specifically, a part of the daily kindergarten curriculum was adjusted to allow for two periods of imaginative sociodramatic play. Play centers were established within the classroom, various themes were introduced with props in each center, and various role-playing techniques were modeled. A total of 90 percent of all questionnaire respondents indicated behavioral growth on at least one item. As compared with teachers, parents rated their children higher on all items before the commencement of the program; these higher ratings resulted in their noting fewer specific items of improvement at the end of the program. Teacher aides indicated more responses in the category of child-child relationships and teacher-child relationships than did parents and teachers. Parents' responses were higher than those of the two other groups in the areas of thought and language, and values of time. (Appendices include a copy of the parent and teacher aide interview questionnaire, a description of the main staging areas for the sociodramatic play centers, a sample daily schedule, a sample monthly peer tutoring report, and results of the questionnaire.) (AS)

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A Program of Curriculum Oriented Directed Play to Enhance Developmental Maturity in Kindergarten Children

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A Program of Curriculum Oriented Directed Play to Enhance Developmental Maturity in Kindergarten Children

by

Rae Hertz

Cluster 17

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A Practicum Report Presented to the Ed.D. Program
in Early Childhood
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Doctor of Education

NOVA UNIVERSITY

1984

PRACTICUM APPROVAL SHEET

This practicum took place as described.

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Richard Goldman, Ph.D.

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Abstract

A Program of Curriculum Oriented Directed Play to Enhance Developmental Maturity in Kindergarten Children. Hertz, Rae G., 1984: Practicum Report, Nova University Ed.D. Program in Early Childhood. Descriptors: Preschool Education/ Sociodramatic Play/ Primary Education/ Pretend Play/ Developmental Learning/ Early Childhood Education/ Curriculum Development

This practiucm addressed the need of teachers and administrators of kindergarten classes to provide programs for children who are chronologically five years of age but developmentally younger. In a review of the literature, the writer found that although many programs exist for pre-school aged children, few are suitable for the kindergarten classroom.

Twenty kindergarten children, grouped homogeneously by birthday, were taught various methods of interaction in socio-dramatic play centers following locally mandated curriculum guidelines. The writer's goal was to increase

the maturity of at least one developmental behavior in the children who participated in the program as observed by at least 80% of all respondents to a questionnaire.

Of the parents, teachers, and aides who completed the questionnaire, 90% indicated developmental growth on at least one item.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Description of Community

The community in which the program took place is a rural area where most of the 800 students who attend the school are transported by bus. Pasco County is located on the west coast of central Florida directly north of Tampa and St. Petersburg. Although it ranks 37th in geographical size, it is among the most rapidly growing counties in the state. The county is eighth in size of population due to recent inward migration. This burgeoning rate of growth is expected to continue and projected figures for 1990 show that the population will be nearly doubled in the next five years. (State of Florida, Division of Economic Development, 1983). Due to the inflated growth rate much of the existing employment is in construction related industries.

The school district ranks 14th in size, of 67 counties; there are 36 public schools and the total school population includes 26,000 students.

The school at which this program took place is one of ten open-pod schools that were built by the school district in the early 1970's. As educators became aware that there were larger numbers of children than originally suspected for whom large open classrooms with varieties of activities to choose from would not provide the best learning experience, many of those schools were gradually modified to include partially self-contained classrooms. The targeted school is one of those. Geographically, the school is placed between an orange grove and a retirement community of several hundred homes.

The local staff, who deal directly with the kindergarten children, includes five classroom teachers, five full-time teacher adies, and an active community volunteer force. There is a certified developmental examiner, in house, who was trained by the National Institute of Child Development. Highly supportive staff members are available to assist teachers in fulfilling the requirements of the state mandated, preventative early childhood education program (PREP). There is weekly interaction by the children with media center personnel, the music teacher, and the physical education department.

The kindergarten children of the targeted school are from families of low-to-middle range in socio-economic status. This fact and others (warm weather, high employment in construction trades) may account for the highly transient student population - throughout the year - at this school.

Children entering the kindergarten were homogeneously grouped in classes according to birhtdate. This policy was adhered to, wherever possible, with new entries. As developmental testing, teacher observation, and growth in the kindergarten population occurred, children were re-grouped as necessary.

The author is a kindergarten teacher with both undergraduate and graduate degrees in early childhood education. She has had extensive experience in teaching the learning disabled, in the administration of assessment tests (including the various Weschler intelligence scales), and has received inservice and seminar training in developmental placement. Current responsibilities include being grade-level chairperson and classroom teacher.

CHAPTER II

STUDY OF THE PROBLEM

A substantial percentage (approximately 33%) of children who enter kindergarten at age five, are developmentally younger, that is; they frequently exhibit behaviors generally recognized as being associated with younger children. Typical age-related behaviors have been well documented by Dr. Arnold Gesell (1977) and others.

Developmentally immature children, when faced with a curriculum that has been well planned to meet the needs of the typical five year old child, will be frustrated and disruptive. Disruptive behaviors that are shown under these circumstances are not the behaviors of "problem" five year old children, but rather the expected behaviors of children who are four or four and one half years old.

Without the application of developmental readiness concepts classroom problems such as these are often dealt with as discipline problems.

When developmentally younger children are disciplined, for what is really behavior that is natural to them, they see themselves as "in trouble". "When children are in trouble, they revert to developmentally younger behaviors." (Dr. Clyde Gillespie, at an inservice session, 1982). And so a negative cycle of behavior has begun.

Briefly stated, a significant number of five year old children who enter kindergarten are exhibing behaviors usually related to younger children (four to four and one half years of age). These behaviors are disruptive to the teacher, the classroom as a unit, and to the children themselves. The existence of such problems in typical kindergarten classrooms has been well documented by local school district operational procedures.

In 1979, PREP (Primary Education Program) was mandated by the state of Florida, requiring that each county prepare a plan of pupil progression that would provide expanded diagnostic and treatment services in kindergarten through grade three and that would insure that the individual needs of those students were being met.

Program guidelines, as provided by the state, called for various teaching strategies to be applied in the classroom. Children were tested upon entrance to the school and based on those tests and teacher observations, the children were placed in one of three instructional programs, as follows:

Preventative: for children who have current or potential learning problems.

Developmental: for children who are performing as expected for their age and grade.

Enrichment: for children who show unusual promise or creativity.

It became evident, very early in the implementation of the PREP program that many more children than expected were being assigned to preventative strategies. A closer look at the preventative program assignments revealed that frequently the learning problems were really behavioral problems. When administrators sought help from the National Institute of Child Development, it was learned that many of the behavior probelms could be caused by developmental overplacement.

Why are so many five year old children in this area demonstrating behaviors that are typical of much younger children of four or four and one half years of age (Gesell,Ilg, & Ames, 1977)? Children who are developmentally younger than their chronological ages will display that fact in various ways. As previously quoted by Dr.Gillespie, "...children in trouble, revert to younger behaviors..." That trouble could be problems at home (separation, divorce, or abuse) or it could be that thay are unable to perform some of the tasks that are demanded of them by the kindergarten curriculum.

In her book, Unicorns Are Real: A Right-Brained Approach to Learning (1982), Barbara Meister Vitale states that young children are not ready for the type of curriculum they are often expected to deal with in kindergarten classrooms, including abstract-symbolic paper and pencil tasks.

The Gesell Institute has researched children and developmental placement for many years and that research has shown (Ames,1978) that "at least one child in three may be overplaced and struggling with the work of a grade which is really beyond his ability."

Several issues about the changing patterns of family life are causative factors in cases of developmentally immature youngsters. The high divorce rate has resulted in a high rate of single parent families (usually mother, who is usually employed). Where two parent families do exist the economic conditions usually require both parents to work. The result is often over-tired, stressful parents with little quality time to be spent in playful interaction with their young children.

A large proportion of young children in kindergarten today are unclear about how to behave within the family structure since, in many cases, the family structure itself keeps changing. Joseph Julian (Social Problems, 1973) discusses family structure and family roles. Five criteria of adequate family functioning (Glasser & Glasser, 1966) are contained in his work. These are: "internal role consistency": youngsters need to know what is expected of them and what is expected of others in the family unit. "Consistency of family roles": Patterns of behavior should remain the same, in the family, with few abrupt changes.

"Compatability of family roles" with norms of behavior expected by society is important. "Meeting the psychological needs of family members": Long term emotional and psychological needs must be met. "The ability of the family group to respond to change": The family unit must respond to change in positive ways, whether that change is internally or externally originated.

With their limited language skills and inexperienced emotional structures, preschool children have difficulties in adjusting to the normal pressures (job changes, economic stress, or illness) which are felt by even relatively stable, two parent families. Pressures, such as those caused by death, divorce, violence, moving, new step-family members, and custody disagreements can make it very difficult for young children to know how to behave in strange, new situations. Children could learn, through role-playing techniques and positive interaction with peers and teachers, new behaviors to help them have better relationships both at home and at school. Due to the rural nature of the local environment children may have few interactive play experiences prior to entering kindergarten.

The fact that there is at least one television set in over 90% of all American homes, and that the average child watches approximately 15,000 hours of television by high school graduation, while only spending about 11,000 hours in school, (Singer & Singer, 1977) is certain to have an effect on the preschool behavioral development of children.

The deleterious effects of televison advertising and violence on young children has been well documented (Singer & Singer, 1977). Of equal importance to the early childhood educator is the lack of imaginative play strategies in young children. The hours in front of the television set are hours when social and playful interaction are not taking place.

Singer and Singer(1977) express the personal belief that children would be better off without <u>any</u> television viewing in their lives until their reading skills are well established. Realizing that this is not possible, they suggest some elements of shows that would be suitable for children to watch.

Shows that could promote healthy attitudes in young children should have positive adult figures, should encourage imaginative play by showing characters a child would want to imitate, and should portray a clear distinction between fantasy and reality. It is quite clear to the discerning observor that television shows of that quality, for children, are in the vast minority.

The accelerated pace of television programming (most shows are presented in half hour blocks with about eight minutes of commercial messages) tends to reduce perseverance and might limit imaginative thinking in young children.

In order to truly understand socio-dramatic play as it relates to children who are developmentally immature it is necessary to review the current literature.

Almy (1982) discusses play as it is viewed by teachers and researchers; she does see differences. She describes the "surplus energy theory" (allowing active children to play out excess energy). Other notions held by teachers through the years have included: "the recreation theory" (hard play balances hard work), and the "practice theory" (children learn through their play).

Other theories of play as reported by Almy include the psychoanalytical (Erickson, Freud, and Isaacs), the developmental (Piaget), and the evolutional(Bruner). She also discusses several distinguishing characteristics of play, including: intrinsic motivation, attention to means rather than ends, non-literal behavior, freedom from external rules, self rather than object and active engagement. She suggests that recognition of these characteristics of play will help teachers to distinguish, specifically, when children are at play and when they are not.

In the article, "Guidelines for Facilitating Sociodramatic Play" (1984), Carol Young Woodard states that although educators seem to be in agreement that make believe play is important to the development of young children, few teachers (and fewer parents) become involved in helping children to learn to express themselves through dramatic play. Sociodramatic play can lower egocentricity, promote concentration, and heighten imagination , creativity, and cooperation in young children.

The self directed interests of children in play help them to learn to deal with problems in their social world according to Millie Almy. Other distinctive features of play are stated in her article, "A Child's Right to Play" (1984). Children become more flexible in their thinking as they experiment with problem solving possibilities. The symbolic experiences that children go through in play situations sets the stage for later skills in reasoning and abstract symbols (reading.)

"The 5's and 6's Go to School,Revisited" (Webster,1984) is a retrospective of Emma Sheehy's book (1954) in which Sheehy stated that early childhood programs should be built around the needs of the children; the classroom should be a place where the child's interests can be developed and where natural growth can occur. Thirty years later Webster laments what she sees as the loss of Sheehy's principles in the increasingly "first grade" atmosphere of today's kindergarten curriculum.

In thier chapter called "Facilitating Achievement of Children", Nicholas Anastasiow, Madlyn Hanes, and Michael Hanes (Language and Reading Strategies of Poverty Children, 1982) cite "differences in language as differences in experience, which can be lessened by well designed educational programming. They further suggest that the early years of schooling should contain..."an emphasis on language interaction...and on experiences that provide the child with language examples that illustrate equivalent standard and vernacular expressions."

Bernard Spodek states in a recent paper ("How Should Reading Fit into a Preschool Curriculum?",1980) that if teachers would assume a maturational view of readiness they could assess the maturity level of children, placing those who are ready into an early phase of the reading program and allowing the others time to mature. He also states that "Educators who believe in direct instruction will teach children what they want them to learn, while those who believe in indirect instruction will create situations in which children can learn through their own actions."

In their book Learning:The Keys to Discovery, Clyde and Barbara Gillespie (1983) point out the act of reading is an act of deciphering a very complicated code and that educators often build poor readers by not providing enough concrete experiences or by not giving children enough time to grow. Sometimes a few weeks or even a few days can make the difference in whether or not a particular child is ready to deal with specific steps of the code-breaking process.

Gillian McNamee names the functions of play in his paper "Being with Children:A Psychoanalytic Perspective". They are: survival, the role of play in fundamental cognitive learning and language development, play fosters problem solving and abstract thinking, play stimulates expressions of feelings, play helps to sustain friendships and emotional contacts with peers and adults. He feels that it is unfortunate that many preschool aged children are being denied opportunities for play and that those rich learning experiences are being replaced with hours of group instruction in recognizing shapes, letters, numbers, and numerous other seatwork tasks.

The South Carolina State Department of Education issued a report on the implementation of their basics skills assessment program in December of 1980 in which they discuss the results of the readiness test that was administered to all first grade students in the fall of 1979. Approximately 60% of the students were classified as being ready to begin formal first grade instruction and approximately 38% were classified as "not ready". The problem of developmental preparedness for school experiences is not necessarily an exclusively local problem.

By pushing very young children into academic situations and thus denying them the developmental learning that takes place through play we are preventing the establishment of lifelong skills with which to use educational and recreational time wisely.

CHAPTER III

ANTICIPATED OUTCOMES AND EVALUATION INSTRUMENTS

This program applied many of the positive values of the research to the problem of developmentally immature children in a way that provided them with interactive role-playing techniques and enhanced their developmental maturity. When the curriculum oriented sociodramatic play centers were introduced at intervals throughout the program various techniques of using the centers were taught and then the children were provided with ample time to explore and to develop imaginative play themes on their own.

Parents and school personnel were interviewed, in person or by telephone, using a questionnaire (see Appendixes A and B for samples of the two questionnaires) that has been designed to target typical five year old behaviors.

Participants answered : seldom, sometimes, or often to questions about common behaviors at home and at school. All of the behaviors that are listed on the questionnaire (there are 20) are considered to be typical behaviors of a child who is developmentally fully five years old (Gesell,1977). Therefore, any statements on the questionnaire that were checked "seldom", or "sometimes" were evaluated as indicators that on those particular items, the child was behaving below the developmental age of five years.

The itmes are arranged on the questionnaire according to various types of behaviors, that is; those having to do with mother/child relationships are items one through four (on the school personnel questionnaire the same items reflect the teacher/child relationship). Child/child relationships are dealt with on items five through eight, questions about manners are items nine through twelve, questions dealing with thought and language are items thirteen through sixteen, and values of time are referred to in questions seventeen through twenty. The questionnaires were administered about two weeks after school began and again after the completion of the program implementation.

Parents of the children who participated in the program were asked to sign a permission form (see Appendix C) and were provided with extra copies of that letter and the questionnaire. The return on both items was 100%.

The anticipated outcome for this program was that 80% of the respondents (including teachers, teacher's aides, and parents) would indicate behavioral growth on at least one of the items questioned. It was considered that participation in a program of socio-dramatic play centers would cause increased maturity in both home and school behaviors as observed by parents and teachers. Analyses of the data includes percentages of items showing growth (any item that changed from seldom to sometimes, or from sometimes to often), and percentages of those surveyed who observed that developmental growth took place (see Appendix G).

CHAPTER IV

SOLUTION STRATEGY

In her curriculum guide for preschool teachers Schickedanz (1977) dicsusses the comparison between direct-instruction program and play programs. She suggests careful interpretation of the research which compares play-oriented curriculum with direct-instruction curriculum (often shown to be the "more effective" of the two). She asks the question: "Was the same learning content compared as well as the teaching process?"

Schickedanz (1977) goes on to say that experience makes a difference - along with time- in regard to behavior change. Using symbolic props in dramatic play can facilitate the learning of pre-reading and reading skills in preschool children. She suggests that including books, signs, labels, and language experience stories in various play centers will provide children with opportunities they need to begin to understand the schema and abstraction of reading rules.

It would seem, then, that the abstractions of what we have come to recognize as chronologically mature behavior in young children (Gesell, Ames, Gillespie, Haines, and Ilg, 1979) would become available to children who have the opportunity to take part in the interaction of socio-dramatic play. In dramatic play children act out new skills, patterns, and problem solving techniques. They express creative ideas and develop and enhance language and motor skills (Watrin & Furfey, 1978)

Marilyn Segal and Don Adcock, who have written extensively about both development and play (Just Pretending, 1981) suggest that through imaginative play children are able to relive happy times, overcome unhappy feelings, and gain some sense of control over their lives. They are also able to broaden their sense of the real world while learning to use abstract symbols in thinking, an accepted prerequisite to both reading strategies and more mature behavior.

Other benefits of imaginative play, as discussed by Segal and Adcock, include: learning to develop friendships, learning to share feelings (fear, joy, anger, sadness, and jealousy), planning cooperatively, and working out conflicts. Although these two experienced educators and authors provide much valuable information about the positive aspects of play they do not discuss specific results, in observable terms, of programs that use play.

Turner and Helms (Life Span Development, 1979), describe play as "children's work" (a phrase that is frequently used in the research). They discuss play as meaningful sets of activities that help children relate to their surrondings.

The National Institute of Mental Health, in a 1981 report, suggests that play is an imperative part of the learning process for very young children for the following reasons:

During play children learn to express emotions such as joy, anger, pride, frustration, and sadness. Through these expressions their awareness of themselves, their environment, and the feelings of others increases.

NIMH also states that the process of play is one of creativity and success for children. If they receive the proper guidance and have successful play experiences they will begin to link the pleasure of play with the mastering of problem solving techniques. Children learn facts through play (this size of pan will only hold this much water). Relationships also become apparent to children as they play and imitation, a learning process in itself, is learned. Children discover, through the play process, how other children react to them. They learn the process of give and take with others. This program was planned to monitor the experiences of children playing and to show, in developmental terms, the effects of directed play on behavioral growth.

The Georgia Department of Education prepared a handbook (Personalizing Education for Children: A Handbook for Early Childhood Educators, K-4, 1982) in which they discuss the following developmental growth factors:

*Development is a total process through which children continually adapt to their environment and organize their experiences. Resulting personal and cognitive structures are a synthesis of old and new experience.

*Although general growth sequences can be determined, children differ in their rate of development, both in contrast to other people and within themselves.

*Readiness cannot be forced although it can be stimulated, (emphasis added).

*Development and growth are influenced by many factors: biological makeup, temperament, previous experience, opportunities for learning, the culture in which one lives, the expectations of significant others, relationships with people in general, and perceptual skills.

The Georgia State handbook includes many important factors in growth and development but does not offer suggestions for incorporating this knowledge into daily classroom operations.

In her paper, "A Preschool Environment for Emergent Reading", (May, 1983) Elizabeth Goetz suggests that socialibility and creativity should be emphazized and "...possibly need to be learned early in life for the full potential of the individual to be reached..."

Eva Essa gives very practical suggestions for dealing with behavior problems, such as those described in the local situation, in her book A Practical Guide to Solving Preschool Behavior Problems, (1983). She suggests that role playing and dramatic play be encouraged in all parts of the classroom. By providing frequent opportunities to role-play in a variety of situations the teacher can solve some types of negative behaviors. Through curriculum oriented directed play this program has attemped to circumvent some of the types of disruptive behaviors that have been described in the local scene.

In the paper "Transitional Class Program,1979-80, OEE Evaluation Report", Prudence Opperman discusses various approaches to early academic failure:

*"...pupils who are not doing well academically in the early grades continue having difficulty as they move on in school and fall futher and further behind."

*One response to these children has been to "hold over" or retain them in the same grade. Pupils are most often left in the same learning environment even though with a different teacher. Often academic growth is not shown and some symptoms of psychological manifestations, due to peer separation and continued feelings of failure, appear.

*Another response to early academic failure has been "social promotion" which places these children in the same grade with their more sucessful peers- and places them in yet another curriculum situation that they are ill-equipped to handle.

*New York City Schools (1980) and other school systems have been attempting to initiate what they view as a more effective approach to these problems: The Transitional Class Program.

*In the transitional class program (as defined by the Office of Educational Evaluation, New York City Public Schools (1980) underachieving pupils were to be removed to a "special environment".

The students would then be returned to regular classes with expectations of future progress. *This plan seemed to achieve it's academic goals (although no statistical evidence was shown) but the plan was not reinstated after the 1979-80 school year due to "administrative problems".

When local administrators conferred with consultants from the National Institute of Child Development regarding the high incidence of children being placed in preventative strategies a developmental kindergarten plan was devised (Gillespie & Gillespie, 1983). This plan was introduced locally during the 1984-85 school year as a pilot developmental kindergarten program. Parents, with a child attending one of four schools in the pilot program, were asked to report to the school, with their child, during the week preceding the beginning of the regular school year. These children were tested by a certified developmental examiner using The Gesell Preschool Developmental Screening Test (Ames, Gillespie, Haines, Ilg, 1979). Using the results of the testing, children were placed in kindergarten classrooms according to their developmental ages.

If the evaluation of the local pilot program for developmental placement in kindergarten classes is positive, it is presumed that it would be instituted in all elementary schools in the county sometime during the 1985-86 school year.

This program of curriculum oriented directed play deals with the problem of developmental maturity, and couldbe applicable to those kindergarten classes, when and if, developmental placement is used countywide.

Some have suggested, as in the "back to basics" movement, that early childhood educators should place more academics in the preschool setting. David Elkind (1970) reports the following arguments by Sava (1968) for more formal learning procedures in preschools:

*To take advantage of the rapid intellectual growth that occurs then.

*To turn the direction of the typical preschool experiences from emphasis on emotional well-being to more cognitive stimulation.

*To take advantage of the eagerness to learn that is shown by the young child.

*The earlier a young child's academically structured education begins, the less time it will take and the less money it will cost.

Elkind refutes each of the above arguments in a logical manner suggesting that the preponderance of evidence is to the contrary: it is certainly evident that in the sixteen years since these arguments <u>for</u> more academics in preschool were put forth by Sava nothing in education costs less, and the children aren't completing the process any sooner.

Other possible solutions to the behavioral and educational problems of developmentally immature children are:

*Change the total kindergarten program so that it fulfills the needs of the developmentally younger students. This would be ineffective for three reasons: (1) it would not provide for the majority of kindergarten students who are chronologically <u>and</u> developmentally on target (2) it would not be in compliance with school board requirements and (3) it would be impossible to achieve at the local level.

*Refuse admittance to developmentally immature students. This would not comply with state or county mandates and such students would be denied their educational rights.

*Change the age requirement at which compulsory kindergarten attendance is mandatory. This is accomplished by state legislation and also could not be changed locally.

Homogeneous grouping by age alone has not served to solve the problem of the developmentally "young" child and Paula Freedman (1981) suggests that the investigation is rather weak and that researchers have not studied specific aspects of such grouping in terms of a number of variables. Perhaps the combination of homogeneous grouping and socio-dramatic play offers a better solution.

A program of curriculum oriented directed play to enhance developmental maturity in kindergarten children was chosen as the solution to the local problem described earlier. A part of the daily kindergarten curriculum was adjusted (see sample schedule, Appendix E) to allow for two periods of imaginative socio-dramatic play.

Play centers (see Appendix D) were established within the classroom and various themes were introduced (one theme at each center, each three week period). Props that were necessary for imaginative play at each center were introduced and various role-playing techniques were modeled. The themes, props, and role-playing techniques were centered on the curriculum that has been established by the county for kindergarten classrooms (see Appendix D). The county curriculum includes specified daily or weekly teaching times for various subject areas. Also included in the daily schedule, both in and out of the specific play centers, were perceptual-motor development, large and small muscle movement, eye-hand coordination, and visualization.

Sara Smilansky (as reported by Singer & Singer,1977) points out that imaginative games played by preschool children will help prepare them for the more formal learning atmosphere of the primary grades that follow. Every potentially successful plan of self improvement, from losing weight to closing more sales, involves the technique of seeing ourselves in the process of completing the desired task (Singer & Singer,1977). The beginnings of attaining positive visualizations are found in the imaginings of preschool socio-dramatic play.

Part of the process of introducing each new play theme was the modeling of some types of behaviors that could go on there since it has been shown that some of the developmentally inadequate behaviors that are displayed by children could be caused by a lack of interactive skills (Smith, Sarason, R.E., & Sarason, B.R., 1978). A very important aspect of peer interaction through socio-dramatic play, such as that which took place with small groups of children at the play-theme centers, is that children learn very

rapidly from each other (Thomas, 1975). Even in a class where the children have been homogeneously grouped by birthdates there will be a diversity of backrounds. Family structures will differ (one parent and two parent families), ages, interests, and working experiences of parents will differ. Children will live in different kinds of structures (apartments, mobile homes, and single family houses). All of these differences can provide a broad base of knowledge, which, when shared, could expand the intellectual horizons of all of the children.

Segal & Adcock (1983) make suggestions for structuring of the role-modeling of play events in the classroom:

*Play participation by adults should be a daily event. This will reduce the excitement of the children in the play scene as they become used to sometimes seeing teachers and aides in a play role.

*Plan the classroom setting so that only four or five children are involved in any one theme.

*Have one of the children in the play group take over the role being played by the adult. This will help the play scenario to continue when the teacher leaves.

Inherent in the very nature of socio-dramatic play is the potential for conflict, aggression, and non-participation by some children. Adcock & Segal (Play Together:Grow Together,1983) provide specific suggestions for dealing with these difficulties in the classroom play situation.

*To help resolve conflict they suggest that the teachers deal with feelings rather than actions. Help the children to talk things out, and try to present new problem solving ideas in ways that children can accept.

*To aid aggressive children in the classroom they reccomend that teachers first deal with their own feelings about the subject and then handle the specifics of aggressive behavior in the classroom- even though the reasons for such behavior may have begun at home.

*To help children see the negative aspects of their actions (others don't want to play with aggressive children) and the positive aspects (playing with

other children, in a cooperative way, can be fun) of their actions can help reduce disruptive activities in the play centers.

*Shy children and children who choose not to participate in play for other reasons (not necessarily known to the teacher) may be helped by strongly reinforcing whatever spontaneous play they do become involved in throughout the day.

Margaret Gallegos, in her paper "Learning Academic Skills Through Play" (January, 1983) examined several positive aspects of the academic play curriculum including:

*The reduction of behavior problems since children are not operating at peak frustration levels.

*Physical development of large and small muscle groups, coordination, and balance.

*The growth of social and communication skills.

*The enhancement of cognitive development (through the creative problem solving of play situations) and the growth of specific academic skills (classification, sequencing, discrimination, and identification).

Some educators believe (Brown, 1974) that children learn more from what they select themselves as learning activities. In Brown's opinion play involves: "testing, exploring, experimenting, absorbing, and directing oneself". She also discusses what play can do for children:

*"Builds self-confidence", the child is the decision maker and can carry out his activities without fear of failure.

*"Assists in mastery of materials and aids physical development", children will repeat activities and gain mastery of body movements.

*"Helps children learn to relate to others", children can learn to respect the property and wishes of others through the interaction that takes place during play.

*Encourages children to seek words to express their feelings and ideas", as children enjoy new experiences, they use new words, thus facilitating language development.

#"Play is a mirror of a child's world", problems, satisfactions, weaknesses, and strengths can be seen.

#"Play helps children to understand their world", through imitation and expression anxieties and hostilities can be worked out.

Brown also suggests that it is time for the teacher to enter the play situation as a participant when safety rules are being violated or when children can't get started in a play scene.

In Teaching to the Rhythm of Development (1983), Barbara and Clyde Gillespie discuss the approaches to, and experiences of, play as shared by children at various developmental ages.The four year old enjoys dramatic play and usually chooses roles that call for action. While working through real life happenings in a socio-dramatic play situation the four year old shows a fluid type of mental organization that is able to take in the whole situation at once.

At four and one half years of age there is much shifting from play area to play area (therefore the option of changing play situations should be built into any program for four and one half year old children). These children are at "the perfect age" to gain basic concepts through dramatic play, according to the Gillespies. The connection between various jobs and the community services they stand for (fireman, policeman, and dentist relate to health and safety), can be experienced and easily understood through play. The dramatic play of the five year old child is very literal, connected to the "here and now" and related to establishing friendly and family relationships.

This program of curriculum oriented directed play was effective by allowing developmentally immature kindergarten children to learn socialization skills, along with required curriculum material, in a way that is natural to them: play. By learning specific techniques of socio-dramatic play the children became less egocentric and more flexible,as observed by parents and teachers. Thus, the children became more capable of typical age-related behaviors.

Prior to the opening date of school the incoming kindergarten children were placed in class groups according to birthdate. Those children who had most recently turned five were to participate in this developmental program. Other factors were eventually considered when final class placement was made. Some of those considerations were: the addition of a new kindergarten teacher to the staff due to continued new registrations of kindergarten children after school had opened, teacher observations, PREP staffing, and the results of developmental testing using The Gesell Preschool Developmental Screening Test (Ames, Gillespie, Haines, & Ilg, 1979). The results of that testing, as administered by a developmental examiner who was trained by the National Institute of Child Development (Clyde Gillespie, director) were that of the children who were to complete the program four of them were developmentally 4.0 yrs., ten of them were developmentally 4.5 yrs., and six of them scored developmental ages of 5.0.

Other patterns, within the class grouping, began to emerge as health, speech and language, PREP, and physical fitness screenings were completed. Of the total number of children who participated in the complete program (20), 25% were identified during the health screening as having asthma, serious allergies, or other respiratory illnesses. During the speech and language screening it was determined that more than 50% of the group had some speech difficulties and were scheduled for either full speech evaluations or rescreenings at a later date. The PREP (Primary Education Program, State of Florida) screening, which includes observations of and input from the principal, the PREP specialist, and the classroom teacher, resulted in all of the students being staffed into preventative strategies (for children having current or potential learning problems). The physical fitness test that is administered to kindergarten children is an adapted model of the test which is endorsed by the President's Council on Physical Fitness. Of the six sub-tests that

were given (including sit-ups, broad jump, and run-walk), 50% of the group failed from 50% to 90% of the subtests. All other kindergarten students who were tested passed 90% of the subtests. Other indicators of developmental immaturity, that were observed within the classroom setting, were: difficulty separating from parents, crying for long periods of time, bathroom accidents, and continuously asking the question, "when will it be time to go home?"

While the screenings and group placements continued the main staging areas for the socio-dramatic play centers were being prepared. The housekeeping center contained child-sized refrigerator, sink, cabinet, table, chairs, highchair, and bassinet (with babydoll). Other props included: plastic dishes, pan/lid, tea kettle, measuring implements, "play" foods, and real food containers, tablecloth, flowers for the table, and two telephones. Many variations of settings and props could be provided for the housekeeping center. The blocks center contained

a standard set of assorted wooden blocks that were buff colored and a set of smaller, brightly painted wooden blocks. Both sets contained assorted sizes and shapes. That center also contained some assorted cardboard boxes and a large plastic mat (approximately 4ft. by 4ft.) which had a country scene painted, map-style, on one side (including a barn, fields, a lake, some houses, and roads). The mat had a city scene on the other side (buildings, streets, a city park, and an airport). Although this item was commercially made, the same thing, or a desired variation, could be drawn on an old bedsheet. The serendipity center (called the school center by the children, no matter what the theme of play was) contained: two desks, tubs with crayons, pencils, scissors, and hole-punches, assorted sizes and weights of paper, matching games, a play typewriter (cardboard box with a picture of an actual typewriter keyboard glued on top), and the calendar and alphabet (on the wall, at child level). There were several other centers in the room, but these three main staging areas were consistently the most popular.

To allow for control of movement within the room and still allow the children to go to different centers within the play period, a system of color-coded passes was devised. Each center was labled by it's activity (the name of the center was written on sentence strips and placed on the wall near that center), and each center was assigned a set of colored, tagboard necklaces as follows:

Orange - Books

Yellow - Blocks

Red - Housekeeping

Blue - Games

Purple - Puppets & Puzzles

Brown - School

Pink - Bean Bag Toss

Green - Chalkboard

Children were assigned to begin at a particular center according to a rotating schedule, by table. On Monday table "A" would begin at the orange and yellow centers, table "B" would begin at the red and blue centers, and so on. After everyone has begun at a center, a child may move to another center if he/she sees a pass at that center.

The significance of peer volunteers should not be ignored when discussing the effectiveness of this program. Fourth, fifth, and sixth grade students who were on task in their own classwork volunteered to be helpers in K-3 classrooms. They were interviewed and finally selected by the guidance counselor who coordinated the program locally (see Appendix F for a sample Monthly Peer Tutoring Report). These students were available to direct the play of a small group of kindergarten children during the afternoon center time when both teacher and aide were working with other groups. A total of 86 hours of classroom time was contributed by the peer volunteers and the interaction was constructive and valuable.

The variations on themes for each main staging area (see Appendix D) were introduced at the beginning of each three week period during the afternoon directed lesson time. Other activities of the school day for that particular week were planned to coincide with the introductions of the new themes. For instance, during the first week when "Family and Child Care" was introduced at the housekeeping center the books for morning storytime

(see Appendix E) were books about family. When books, filmstrips, movies, and other classroom activities were planned, they were planned to connect with the socio-dramatic play themes being introduced that week. Directed lessons for each new theme were carried out at the main staging areas as follows:

WEEK ONE-

Monday: Teacher directed lesson held at the housekeeping center.

Topic: Family and Child Care.

Content: Using the question, "Who lives at home with you?" as a starting point the children and teacher discussed home and family roles and what kinds of play could go on at the housekeeping center. The children offered many ideas: "You could make lunches", "Go shopping", "Clean house", "Do the laundry", "Make coffee for daddies when they're late for work". Based on such comments by the children, a brief role play situation was carried out.

WEEK ONE-

Tuesday: Teacher directed lesson held at the block center.

Topic: Country Life.

Content: Using the "country" side of the plastic mat (previously described) as a starting point the children and teacher discussed country life and what kinds of play could go on at the block center using the "country life" theme. Some ideas offered by the children were: "You could feed the animals", "Pick the fruit", "Build a barn over here, there aren't enough barns", "Go swimming, here's a lake!" Based on this discussion, the children, with the teacher taking an active part, built a country life scenario using the mat and the blocks.

WEEK ONE-

Wednesday:Teacher directed lesson held at the serendipity center.

Topic: School

Content: As with the other two beginning themes, the one that was probably most familiar to the children was chosen as the introductory theme.

One leading question, "What kinds of things could we do at the school center?", began the discussion. The children were very sure of themselves and provided many suggestions: "We could say the letters.", "Practice drawing.", "Look at books.", "Write the alphabet.", "Do the calendar.", "Punch holes.", and "Cut paper." The role-playing scenario took place very naturally, with the teacher choosing to be "one of the kids".

For the remainder of week one and for all of weeks two and three the teacher directed the play during morning centers in an unobtrusive way. Moving from center to center, the teacher was able to resolve conflict, make suggestions, and take brief, minor roles in dramatic play situations while still maintaining classroom control. Although play themes often varied widely, within a center, and within a daily play period, that was expected and encouraged. The "themes" were introduced as a base, a starting place from which the children could share play experiences.

WEEK FOUR-

Monday: Teacher directed lesson held at the housekeeping center.

Topic: Cooking

Content: The introduction of this theme began with a discussion of where things should be kept in the kitchen and led to such questions as:
What do we keep in the refrigerator, and why?
What is the difference between dry and wet food?
How is powdered lemonade mixed?
Where should lemonade be kept after it's mixed?
What kinds of foods do we cook and why? Role playing went on throughout the discussion.

WEEK FOUR-

Tuesday: Teacher directed lesson held at the block center.

Topic: City Life.

Content: The children were quite comfortable with this type of lesson by this time. While using the "city" side of the plastic mat a discussion was held about the differences between living in the city and living in the country. Some ideas offered by the children were: "More traffic in the city", "Lots more cars", "More people", "Not very many places to play", "Bigger buildings", and "More stores, more stuff to do". A city scene was built using the mat and blocks.

WEEK FOUR-

Wednesday:Teacher directed lesson held at the serendipity center.

Topic: Office.

Content: The introduction of this theme began with discussion of different kinds of work and places where that work could take place. Using the props that were already at the school center, with the addition of the play typewriter, the children chose the "school office" to role-play. (One of the classroom jobs that the children do is to take attendance to the office; thus, familiarity with the "school office").

WEEK SEVEN-

Monday: Teacher directed lesson held at the serendipity center.

Topic: Restaurant.

Content: During the introduction of this center the teacher and children talked about why people eat in restaurants, the different kinds of restaurants the children had been to, how some foods are prepared in restaurants, and why good manners are important when we eat.

The restaurant role-play situation involved some discussion of what to order and why some foods are better for us than others.

WEEK SEVEN-

Tuesday: Teacher directed lesson held at the block center.

Topic: Outer Space.

Content: The children had no difficulty in contributing to a discussion of space travel and outer space. The role-play included captain and crew of a spacecraft; the blocks became a city in space. The children returned to this theme of block play many times during the continuing four weeks of the directed play program.

WEEK SEVEN-

Wednesday: Teacher directed lesson held at the serendipity center.

Topic: Store.

Content: The introduction of this center included a discussion of such questions as: Why do we have to pay for things in a store?, How do we get the money to pay for things that we want to buy?, and Why should we save money?

Using small coins cut from construction paper as money, the teacher and the children in the group made small pictures to sell from the "store". As the theme continued at this center, the children drew and cut out many different items to "sell" at the "store".

Meeting with the children in small groups and taking part in role-play of the introductory lesson seemed to make it natural for the teacher to take part in various play situations throughout the program. The various play themes, as introduced in a particular center, were not always used by the children in that center. The space theme, for instance, was used at several centers, not just at blocks. This would seem to indicate that the themes were internalized by the children, allowing for the carry-over from center to center.

CHAPTER V

RESULTS, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The writer's goal for this program was surpassed since 90% of all respondents to the questionnaire indicated behavioral growth on at least one item (see Appendix G). There were some significant differences between the responses of the parents and those of the teacher/aides. Parents, not unexpectedly, rated their children somewhat higher on all items on the initial questionnaire than did teachers and aides. This resulted in fewer specific items of improvement as seen by parents on the second questionnaire. Still, 85% of the parents indicated behavioral growth on at least one item. The percentages of responses indicating developmental growth on five or more and ten or more items remains accordingly higher for teachers and aides. No parents indicated growth on fifteen or more items and only two percent of teacher/aide respondents indicated behavioral growth on all twenty items.

The percentages of responses of teacher/aides and parents within the various categories of questions are quite similar. Of all the responses given by teacher/aides, seventeen percent were in the category of "teacher/child" relationships compared with fifteen percent of parent responses (see Appendices H & I). Teacher/aides indicated more responses in the category of child/child relationships than did parents. The significant difference between teacher/aide responses and parents responses (5 percentage points) in the category of "manners" is probably due to the differences in perceptions of "manners" in the home and "manners" in the classroom. Parent responses were slightly higher in the area of "thought and language" (2 percentage points) and considerably higher (9 percentage points) in "values of time".

It can be concluded that a program of curriculum oriented socio-dramatic play can enhance the maturity of developmentally younger children thus reducing behavior problems and improving the quality of the educational environment.

For successful replication of this program it is recommended that teachers conduct a brief training period for peer volunteers. This would help to clarify the role of the older child in the socio-dramatic play situation thus insuring quality use of the volunteer's time in the classroom. Although a variety of main staging area topics could be chosen (according to teacher interests and talents, children's interests, or curriculum requirements), it is recommended that the number of main staging areas be kept to a minimum for purposes of lesson planning and satisfactory classroom management.

This report has been made available to the local principal, the developmental examiner, and the supervisor of early childhood education. The report, the process, and the results have been presented to the staff at a grade level meeting.

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APPENDIX A

PARENT INTERVIEW QUESTIONNAIRE

61

	seldom	sometimes	often
1.Relationship with parents is pleasant			
2.Likes to help out at home			
3.Openly expresses affection			
4.Likes to obey			
5.Prefers playmates of own age			
6.Rough,bossy, or cries during play			
7.Plays better outside than inside			
8.Unconcerned about the behavior of others			
9.Says "Please" & "Thank You" (with some reminders)			
10.Can greet friends and teachers			
11.Usually behaves well with "company"			
12.Likes to be present when "company" is there			
13.Likes to talk; will talk to anyone			
14.Seeks information; asks many questions			
15.Interested in new and large words			
16.Uses reasonably accurate grammar			
17.Knows when events happen during the day			
18.Knows age at next birthday			
19.Can name days of the week			
20.Knows what day it is today			

(Compiled from "Growth Gradients", The Child from Five to Ten,Gesell, Ilg, & Ames, 1977.)

APPENDIX B

TEACHER/AIDE INTERVIEW QUESTIONNAIRE

	seldom	sometimes	often
1.Likes teacher,relationship is pleasant			
2.Obeys teacher as a matter of course			
3.Seeks teacher for affection/approval			
4.Quotes teacher as an authority			
5.Prefers playmates of own age			
6.Rough,bossy, or cries during play			
7.Plays better outside than inside			
8.Unconcerned about the behavior of others			
9.Says "Please" and "Thank You" (with some reminders			
10.Can greet friends and teachers			
11.Usually behaves well with "company"			
12.Likes to be present when "company" is there			
13.Likes to talk; will talk to anyone			
14.Seeks information; asks many questions			
15.Interested in new and large words			
16.Uses reasonably accurate grammar			
17.Knows when events happed during the day			
18.Knows age at next birthday			
19.Can name days of the week			
20.Knows what day it is today			

(Compiled from "Growth Gradients", The Child from Five to Ten,Gesell, Ilg, & Ames, 1977.)

APPENDIX C

PARENT LETTER

Dear Parents:

As your child's kindergarten teacher, I will be developing activities that will help your child to reach the stated goals in the county's kindergarten curriculum. My plan will help all of the children to make the transition between the world of play and the world of formal school activities.

Through my observations and your comments on the enclosed questionnaire (a second questionnaire will be provided in approximately 10 weeks) I will be able to conclude to what extent our classroom activities have helped the children.

In addition, the report will be an assignment in my graduate program. Neither the children nor the parents will be identified by name in the report. Please sign below that you understand that the questionnaires and the results of these classroom activities are to be used in strict confidence and for educational purposes only. I will be pleased to share the program's progress and the report with you.

Parent Signature Date

Sincerely yours,

APPENDIX D

MAIN STAGING AREAS - VARIATIONS ON A THEME

The main staging areas for the socio-dramatic play centers refer to the geographic setting of the room. Each main area will be maintained throughout the implementation period and only the themes of play and the props to support those themes will be changed. Care has been given to selection of the order of activities so that it follows a natural progression according to the experiences that children bring with them and the experiences that they will share as they proceed through the program.

Example: In the area of housekeeping the first theme that the children will be directed to share is "family and child care", as they bring personal experiences about that theme with them from home.

NOTE: The initial introduction to each area and theme will include discussion of the uses of the various props, backround information about the theme and role-playing with teacher and students. After that children will be assisted as needed but will be encouraged to develop their own imaginative scenarios.

MAIN STAGING AREAS - VARIATIONS ON A THEME

A.HOUSEKEEPING

1.Family and Child Care

Curriculum Content: Health, Social Studies,Language Arts.

2.Cooking

Curriculum Content: Health, Science, Language Arts, Math Concepts.

3.Restaurant

Curriculum Content: Health, Science Language Arts, Math Concepts, Social Studies.

B.BLOCKS (And/Or Cardboard Boxes)

1.Country Life

Curriculum Content: Science, Math, Social Studies, Health, Language Arts.

2.City Life

Curriculum Content: Social Studies, Math, Language Arts

3.Outer Space

Curriculum Content: Science, Math, Social Studies, Language Arts.

MAIN STAGING AREAS - VARIATIONS ON A THEME

C.SERENDIPITY

1.School

Curriculum Content: Math, Social Studies, Science, Language Arts, Handwriting Skills.

2.Office

Curriculum Content: Math, Social Studies, Language Arts, Handwriting Skills.

3.Store

Curriculum Content: Math, Science, Social Studies, Language Arts.

APPENDIX E

SAMPLE DAILY SCHEDULE

9:15-9:40	Lang. Arts: Pledge, Calendar
9:40-10:00	Math
10:00-10:15	Exercise to Music
10:15-10:45	Lang. Arts: Sharing, story
10:45-11:15	Lunch
11:15-12:00	*Directed Play Centers*
12:00-12:45	Rest Time
12:45- 1:05	Science or Social Studies
1:05- 1:35	Music, Library, or Guidance
1:35- 2:10	Physical Education (M, W, F)
	Exercise and Story (T, Th)
2:10- 3:10	* > Teacher Directed Lesson
	> Aide Directed Review
	> Peer Directed Play Centers
3:10- 3:30	Arts and Crafts
3:30- 3:40	Prepare to go Home

* The children are divided into groups according to language arts skill levels. The groups rotate, in 20 minute segments, from teacher to aide to peer directed play.

APPENDIX F
SAMPLE MONTHLY PEER TUTORING REPORT

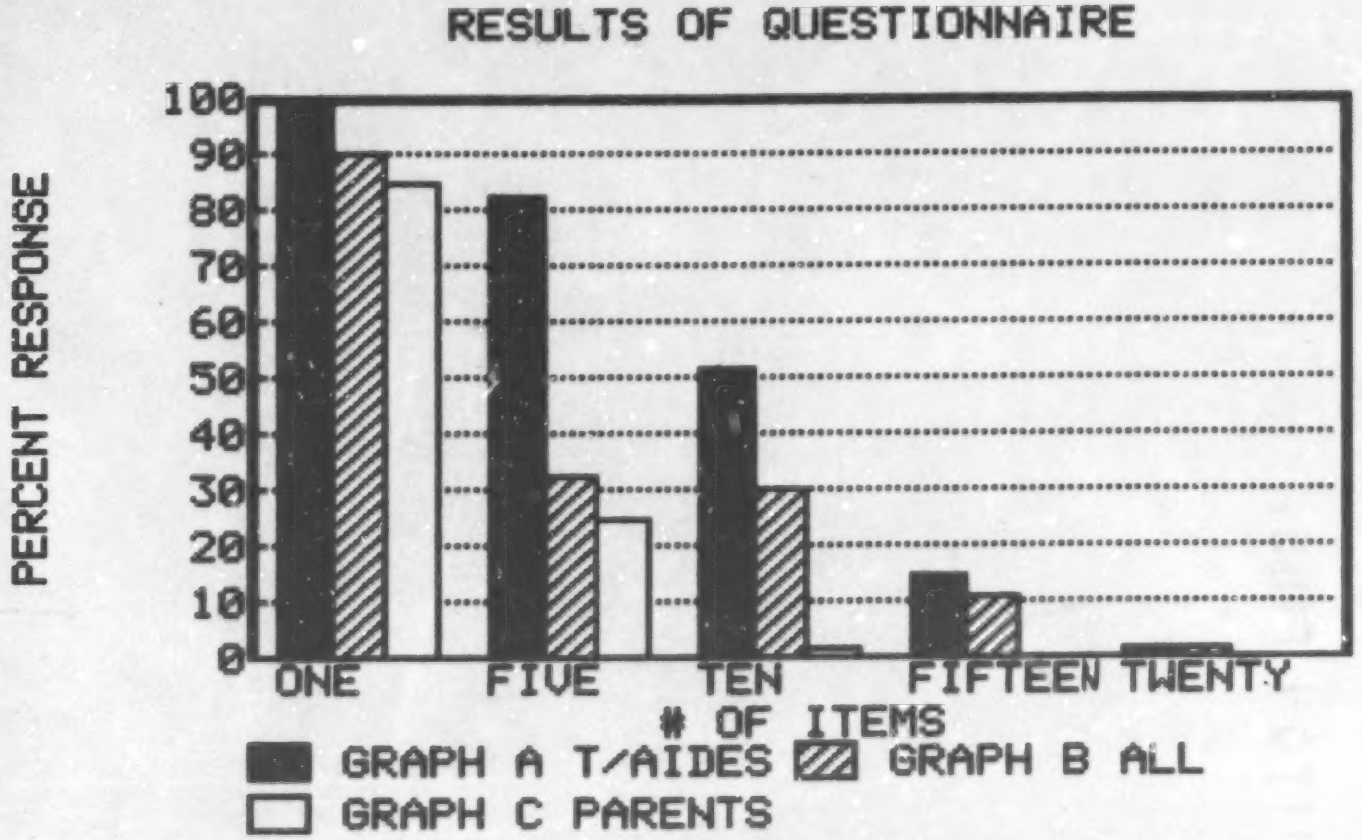
Monthly Peer Tutoring Report

Teacher _____

Month _____

Number of hours worked

Student	Date																												total hours


RESULTS OF QUESTIONNAIRE
PERCENT RESPONSE
100
90
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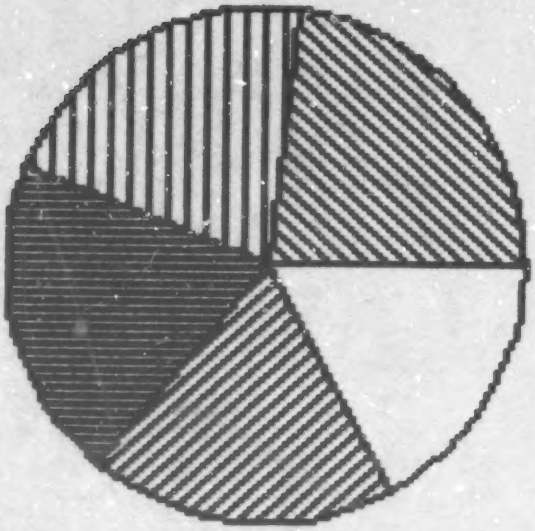
70
60
50
40
30
20
10
0
ONE
FIVE
TEN
FIFTEEN
TWENTY
OF ITEMS
GRAPH A T/AIDES
GRAPH B ALL
GRAPH C PARENTS

APPENDIX H
TEACHER/AIDE RESPONSES

TCH./AIDE RESPONSES



23%
5. VALUES/TIME
21%
4. THOUGHT/LANG.
20%
3. MANNERS
19%
2. CHILD/CHILD
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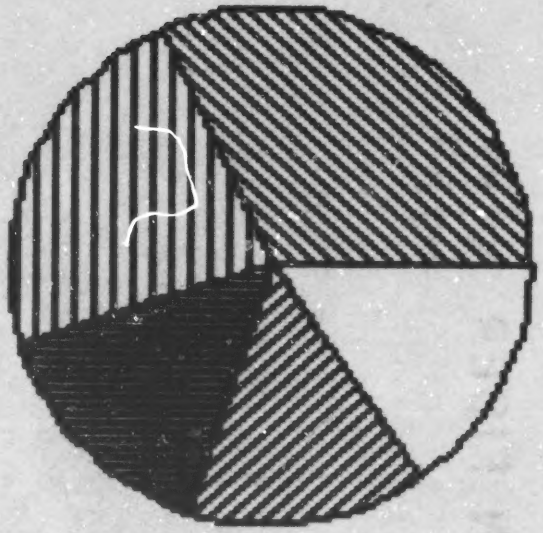
1. TEACHER/CHILD

APPENDIX I
PARENT RESPONSES

PARENT RESPONSES



32%
5. VALUES/TIME
23%
4. THOUGHT/LANG.
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3. MANNERS
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2. CHILD/CHILD
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1. MOTHER/CHILD